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ABSTRACT

The author urges principals to provide their assistant principals with satisfying job experiences beyond those of coping with discipline, attendance, schedule, and food service problems; opportunities for career advancement; and an occasional pat on the back. The author further urges principals to think positively about hiring a qualified woman as a member of the administrative team. Women administrators, she says, are a good administrative investment. (Author/RA)

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SUBJECT: THE NEW ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL--KEY PERSON ON THE PRINCIPAL'S TEAM

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David Austin's NASSP study of the assistant principalship and the personal experiences of many assistant principals in the field are strong evidence that the principal thinks the assistant principal is more important than the assistant principal thinks the principal thinks he is. And therein lies a problem, a communications problem.

Certainly the team approach to administration, so crucial in these critical times in education, needs open, forthright communication, and certainly, too, this team approach should include a sharing of professional bouquets as well as a sharing of professional brickbats. There's not much doubt that the assistant principal often yearns for a pat on the back from the principal, some sign that the principal is pleased with his work and that he considers the assistant principal a worthwhile member of the administrative team. And it doesn't hurt at all that this commendation should occur <u>sometimes</u> before faculty, parents, and students.

The Philadelphia Frontline Conference for Assistant Principals, the first of its kind, emphasized that the assistant principal wants to be an active, learning member of the administrative team, and he wants, too, the satisfactions of knowing that he is doing a good job.

Increasingly many principals are actively demonstrating their

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awareness of the need for a team approach in administration by using administrative teamwork in their schools. The assistant principal today is asking to be a working member of the administrative team. He wants the opportunity to utilize his strengths; he wants to increase the scope of his administrative experiences. If he has weaknesses, he wants to know about them, and he wants the expertise of his principal to help him overcome his weaknesses. In many cases he is asking for a variety of duties, not just those of attendance and discipline, although he is generally aware that those are areas within the realm of administration that he must learn to cope with.

Along with many innovative principals, the "new" assistant principal on the administrative team is searching for better ways to organize the administrative set-up in his school. With the humanizing of education he is feeling increasingly that he wants to get away from the negative aspects of his position, that he wants, for example, as a pupil-personnel worker, to focus on pupil adjustment and meaningful alternatives for students. He feels that the crisis in the classroom has produced a crisis in administration, too, and that there must be much honest soul-searching for better ways for administering a school.

The perceptive assistant principal is aware that the total function and the philosophy of the school need to be realized by each member of the administrative team. While he sees the advantage of carefully defined responsibilities of all members of the team, he also seeks flexibility and creativity in the team, so that there can be a "meshing together," a cohesiveness among the administrative personnel, utilizing the special talents of each team member, complementing and supplementing each individual's skills in a total team effort.

The perceptive assistant principal is aware that this can only be accomplished by good communication and a mutual respect for each individual on the administrative team. He seeks responsibilities, he wants to be involved in decision-making, and he is willing to take on the accountability for his responsibilities and his share in the decision-making. He is certainly aware, too, that all of this can be accomplished only if he is working with a principal who is professionally and personally secure and expert in his role as top administrator.

In his own personal "soul-searching" the new assistant principal makes at least a tentative decision about his own career aspirations: to seek a principalship or to consider the assistant principalship as an end in itself. If he is seeking a principalship, certainly his building principal has a professional obligation to help him in his training, to give him opportunities to broaden his educational experiences, to "critique" his work, to encourage him in professional growth in every way. The principal also has a professional obligation to the assistant principal who prefers that position as a career in itself. The position should be made as professionally valuable as possible, allowing room for growth and for personal satisfactions for the assistant principal..

Principals and other first-level administrators should pressure colleges, universities, and their own school systems to offer courses, management and leadership seminars, institutes, and workshops especially designed for assistant principals. The continuing goal should be that of helping the assistant principal become a more effective member of the administrative team.

It has become common practice to use the pronoun "he" when talking about secondary school administrators. David Austin states that women are not unknown in the assistant principalship but they certainly are not common. His study shows that 14% of the assistant principals in core areas are women, that 10% in urban schools are women, and only 5% in small schools are women. Generally speaking, this means that about one assistant principal in ten is a woman. And research has shown that we are almost static in respect to professional advancement.

Yet women can be very effective members of an administrative team. The women's viewpoint, for example, in working with and evaluating curriculum and pupil-personnel services and policies, in identifying with community, with students, with teachers, in working on high school graduation plans and all types of school functions, in hosting visitors, adds a very valuable dimension to the total administrative team.

Women have another very valuable asset to offer. It has been said that "Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good." Perhaps that's why women are so hard-working when they go into administration; they are in a man's world, and they compensate by working doubly hard. Women are, I believe, one of education's most wasted resources, and I believe this is particularly true in educational administration.

There are five major questions that I'd like to ask principals. Perhaps you'll find them needling; I hope that in any event you'll find them thought-provoking. I'm hoping, too, that assistant principals will discuss the most appropriate questions with their principals

when they return to their schools.

1. Are members of your administrative staff working as a team, utilizing most effectively the strengths of every member of that team? Do you have a school philosophy that is understood by every administrator in your school? Do you have constant two-way communication with your assistant principals? Is your relationship such that problems can be discussed honestly, fairly, and without fear? And finally, do you know the strengths of your assistant principals? And then, knowing those strengths, do you allow your assistant principals to use those strengths?

2. Are you searching for better ways to organize your administrative set-up, listening to new ideas and viewing new administrative approaches with an open mind? Are you sure that some administrative tasks might not be performed as well by clerical or paraprofessional help? When you work toward humanizing in the curriculum, are you working toward humanizing in the administrative offices at the same time?

3. Are you giving your assistant principals opportunities to fulfill their career aspirations? If they are seeking principalships, are you giving them opportunities to train in all aspects of the principalship? Are you encouraging your school system to provide management and leadership seminars for assistant principalships? Are you encouraging colleges and universities in your locality to provide meaningful courses for assistant principals? If you have an assistant principal who sees the position as an end in itself,

are you attempting to help him grow in his position and to increase the satisfactions of his position?

4. And this goes directly into my fourth question. David Austin states that "The satisfactions to be found in the assistant principalship are few and unimpressive to most who occupy this office." Do you honestly attempt to see that your assistant principals receive satisfactions from their positions? Do you allow them to have experiences that can be satisfying? Experiences besides discipline, attendance, bus schedules, locker problems, and food service? Have you thrown them a verbal bouquet lately? Try doing it, not only in private, but occasionally in public--at a meeting with parents, before some staff members, in a gathering of students. When job satisfactions are increased, there may be some healthy results--a happier assistant principal with an improved attitude and improved work, an upgrading of your whole administrative structure, with increasing satisfactions for you as a principal.

5. And finally, when you hire a new assistant principal do you honestly give consideration to women who are qualified in the field? Have you thought positively, and with an open mind, of the assets of having a woman on your administrative team? I think you may find we're a good administrative investment.

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